

## Sources for Roman History to 133

### Introduction

Most literary sources have Rome at their center and show peoples east and west primarily in their relationship with Rome. In the east the archaeological evidence allows for an independent picture. There is more extensive numismatic and epigraphic evidence. The Hellenistic World, aside from Polybius, did not produce much in the way of history, and what they did write was concerned with Rome. Pompeius Trogus was an exception, and dealt with the Hellenistic period in his *Historiae Philippicae*, written under Augustus and epitomized by Justin. There is also the Hasmonaean revolt recorded in the Bible.

### Historians

Polybius was a Greek from Achaia who went to Rome as a hostage. His history on the rise of Rome was in forty books, from 264 to 146. Polybius wrote to teach statesmen and the like, not to entertain. His theme of the Roman Rise led to a universal history, covering Greece and the Hellenistic kingdoms too. He had access to the leading men of his time and the earliest Roman historians such as Pictor. He has a high reputation as far as factual matters are concerned. He is frequently partisan though, and many of his assessments are open to debate. His analysis of the Roman constitution is idealized and theoretical. But as someone who lived in the highest circles of Rome, he deserves respect.

We have 1-5, and most of 6. The continuous narrative breaks off around 216, leaving us in the dark about much of Hellenistic affairs. There are lots of quotations and fragments however, many from Byzantine times. Later writers, such as Dio and Diodorus, drew heavily on Polybius, although their own works do not survive for this period.

Plutarch also used Polybius in his lives. These are concerned with moral qualities, less with politics or military activity. They follow a chronological pattern, but with few indications of specific dates. Still he records much information that is not available elsewhere.

Livy's history, especially the books for 219-167, drew closely on Polybius, although not an exact translation. Since much of Livy survives for this period, it is of highest importance. There are epitomes for the missing books. Eutropius, Aurelius Victor, and Orosius are largely derived from Livy. Livy was more interested in artistry than history, and he confined to himself to a few sources. Besides Polybius, for this period he largely drew on Claudius Quadrigarius and Valerius Antias. Both historians could exaggerate, but the body of detail is probably sound. Livy also drew on the *Annales Maximi*.

After 167 there is no continuous narrative, and we rely on epitomes and later authors. From 154-133 Rome was almost continuously at war, and these are

recorded by Appian. Appian arranged the wars on a geographic or ethnographic basis. Very valuable, often derived from Polybius.

#### Non-historical literature

Later third/early second centuries Rome had a literary awakening. We have fragments of many historians and poets like Ennius, along with a handbook on agriculture by Cato and the plays of Plautus and Terence. Cato's work illustrates many economic and social attitudes. The comedies are more controversial, since they all come from the Greeks and it is unclear how much they were adapted.

#### Non-literary evidence

Papyri are irrelevant for this time period, and archaeological evidence is too broad to be summarized. Coins are numerous, since all major states issued them. They can be readily dated too. Volume, composition, type of coins can all be reflections of important changes. But frequently the historical evidence illuminates the numismatic as much as the other way round.

Inscriptions in the west were often on bronze, which is why so few survive. There are lots of Hellenistic inscriptions of every type, including many communications from the Roman senate in Greek translations. But many cannot be dated closely, there are often bits missing, and we have to read them in isolation, without their social contexts. So inscriptions often shed very narrow but intense, points of light.